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The Effects of Social Exclusion and Acceptance on Third Party Aggression

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In this study, it was examined the effect of social exclusion and acceptance on third party aggression. It was hypothesized that third party aggression would be intensified when the participants were excluded but were accepted by other as a fellow ingroup member. The participants introduced themselves to other participants and were excluded by two participants. Then another participant accepted the participants as a fellow ingroup member. After that they observed that an ingroup fellow member was harmed by an outgroup member and were given a chance to retaliate the harm-doer by using unpleasant noises. The results indicated that aggressive behaviors were increased by acceptance when participants were excluded by other. These results suggest that how strongly the need to belonging engenders intergroup conflict.

Key words: Social exclusion, third party aggression, intergroup conflict

A crucial difference between interpersonal and intergroup aggression is the number of participants involved in a conflict. Since the intergroup aggression is collectively conducted, individuals attempting to retaliate against an attack by the outgroup are not always those who are directly victimized by the attack (Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, & Schmader, 2006), as seen in the cases of terrorisms. When terrorists know in mass medias that the outgroup attacked the ingroup, they may attempt aggression targeting members of the persecuting outgroup. This type of aggression is defined as third party aggression, in which aggression against a harm-doer is undertaken by an individual who did not personally suffer any harm (Kumagai & Ohbuchi, 2001, 2006, 2009a, 2009b). Third party thus refers to an individual who is neither the harm-doer nor the victim of the initial conflict.

A potent motive for an aggressive response to harm is retaliation (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). How are third party persons who have not personally suffered any harm motivated to retaliate? Yzerbyt, Dumount, Wigboldus, and Gordijn (2003) argued that anger reactions and their associated offensive action tendencies were more prevalent when participants were induced to see the victims and themselves as members of a same group. This suggests that group membership and identification may be crucial in the retaliatory motivations for third party individuals. When they highly identifies themselves with the ingroup, they may perceive harm against the fellow ingroup members as a threat to their social self. It affects emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals who identify themselves with the social category.

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Thus group identification moderates a third party's retaliatory motives and aggressive reactions.

Social inclusion and group identification

As mentioned above, it is assumed that group identification is crucial for third party aggression. Group identification is not only enhanced by intergroup relationships such as power differences (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992), permeability of status (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Van Knippenberg & Ellemers, 1990), or resource distribution (for example, realistic group conflict theory, Jackson, 1993; LeVine & Campbell, 1972), but also enhanced by intragroup expericences such as cooperation (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). It is assumed that being accepted as a fellow ingroup member enhances individuals' identification with the ingroup. Baumeiseter and Leary (1995) asserted that humans are driven to seek belongingness and they suffer both physically and psychologically when belongingness needs go unsatisfied. This suggests that belongingness or being socially accepted is basically attractive for humans and people or groups which give it may be attractive. According to Jackson and Smith (1999), attractiveness is one of dimentions to increase group identification. Since similarity with others is a signal of the validity of one's own attitude and actions, it functions as a psychological reward, resulting in its becoming an attraction (Brewer, 1991, 1993; Brewer & Pickett, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell. 1987). Brewer and Kremer (1986) showed that simply by emphasising similarity, group identification was enhanced. Because acceptance is attractive, it enhances group identification. Acturally, Kumagai (2007) showed that the sense of acceptance, which was generated by the procedural fairness, enhanced group identification. Thus it is assumed that being accepted as a fellow ingroup member may enhance group identification, which in turn intensifies third party aggression against outgroups.

Although acceptacne enhances group identification, it may be moderated by the situational belongingness. Accordnig to the regulatory model of belonging need by Pickett and Gardner (2005), a belongingness deficit is predicted to lead individuals to monitor social information providing cues to acceptance and inclusion. Because the information which individuals seek is worthwhile and attractive for them, it is assumed that the more strongly individuals felt being excluded, the more attractive the information indicating acceptance is to them. Therefore, when individuals are accepted by fellow ingroup members after they experienced social exclusion, they may be more attracted by the ingroup and strongly identify themselves with the ingroup. Then, it is predicted that third party aggression will be more intense when individuals experience exclusion by others then they are accepted by fellow ingroup members than when they are just accepted without the experience of exclution. To examine this prediction, this study constructed two levels of exclusion (exclusion vs. no exclusion) and two levels of acceptance (accepted vs. neutral). In each condition, the participants observed an outgroup member harmed a fellow ingroup member, then they were given an opportunity to punish the harm-doing outgroup member.

Method

The participants and experimental conditions

Thirty six Japanese students (22 men and 14 women) of a large public university in northern Japan were recruited from an introductory psychology class to participate in the experiment. The participants were given a 500-yen book coupon as reward for their voluntary participation (500 yen equaled approximately 4.5 US dollars at the time). The participants were randomly assigned into one of four conditions (each N = 9) across the two levels of exclusion (exclusion vs. no exclusion) and the two levels of acceptance (accepted vs. neutral).

On their arrival at the laboratory, an experimenter took the participants to small room which contained two computers. The experimenter told them that two experimental sessions were conducted in a group of four participants (two of them were confederates); the purposes of the first session was to make impressions of the others and that of the second session to examine the effects of stress on creative activities.

Manipulation of exclusion

As the first session, the experimenter asked participants to introduce themselves in three minutes, mentioning the topics such as "the most pleased thing," "the matter which you can not give way," and "self at 30 years old." Then, they rated each other on "introverted," "leading," and "social" using a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 3 (Definitely) and answered a question "Do you want him or her to be as a fellow group members?" (there were two answers, "I want to include him or her a fellow ingroup member" or "I do not want to include him or her a fellow ingroup member").

Then, the experimenter took each of them to separate rooms and handed two answered questionnaires which two of participants ostensibly answered "I do not want to include him or her as a fellow group member." In the no exclusion condition, the participants were not handed those answers.

Manipulation of acceptance

After the manipulation of exclusion, in the accepted condition, the experimenter handed another questionnaire which ostensibly answered "I want him or her to be a fellow group member" by the third participants. In the neutral condition, the participants were not handed that answer.

Stress session

Then, the confederate joined the participant as the third participant. In the accepted condition, the experimenter told that the confederate accepted the participant, while in the neutral condition, the experimenter gave no information on the acceptance. As the second session, the experimenter asked the confederate to draw five pictures (e.g., objects, figures, landscapes, etc) including given simple shapes (e.g., "Y"), explaining that in order to examine the effect of stress on creative activities, they would exchange the pictures with the other outgroup to evaluate each other. The confederates drew the same pictures in every condition.

Observation of the victim being harmed

After the confederate completed the five pictures, the experimenter carried the pictures to the

outgroup. Then, the participants observed the confederate being harmed by the outgroup in the evaluation of the pictures. For the evaluation, a personal computer was used. On its display, there were nine evaluation buttons labeled "1 (Extremely creative)" through "9 (Not creative at all)." The experimenter explained that these evaluation buttons were connected to different levels of discomfort noises; that is, the poorer the evaluation, the louder the noise the writer would receive. The volume levels of noises were 40dB (Level 1) through 80dB (Level 9), increasing five dB across levels. The participants were given the 3, 5, 7, and 9 levels as samples through a headphone. The confederate who had drawn the pictures sat in the next to the participants. A computer display was put on the table, so the participants could see which levels of evaluations and noises the confederate received. In every condition, the participants observed that the confederate received five poor evaluations (loud noises at the levels of "7", "9", "7", "8" and "9").

Measurement of aggression

The experimenter then gave the participants five pictures that were drawn by a member of the outgroup and asked them to evaluate those pictures using the personal computer. The experimenter instructed participants to click one of the nine evaluation buttons for each picture, and explained that the member of the outgroup would continue to hear the noise for six seconds. The measurement of aggression consisted of the noise intensity that each participant chose for each picture. In the measurement, partitions were placed between the participants and confederates so that they could not see each other.

Debriefing

After the experiment, the experimenter debriefed each participant of the true purpose of the experiment, hypotheses, experimental design, and procedures. The experimenter especially explained that there were no outgroups, and therefore, the participants did not harm anyone.

Results

Aggressive behavior

We examined the mean scores of intensity of noise that the participants gave to the member of the outgroup by two-way ANOVA with a design of exclusion (2) x acceptance (2). An interaction between exclusion and acceptance was significant, $F(1,32) = 5.26$, $p < .05$. A simple main effect of the acceptance was significant only in the exclusion condition, $F(1, 32) = 10.80$, $p < .01$. As shown in Figure 1, among the participants in the exclusion condition, those in the accepted condition selected more intense noises than those in the neutral condition. Also a simple main effect of the exclusion was significant, $F(1, 32) = 4.67$, $p < .05$, only in the accepted condition. As shown in Figure 1, among the participants in the accepted condition, those in the exclusion condition selected more intense noises than those in the no exclusion condition. A main effect of acceptance was significant, $F(1, 32) = 5.54$, $p < .05$. The participants in the accepted condition ($M = 6.15$, $SD = 1.14$) selected more intense noises than those in the neutral condition ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.15$). A main effect of the exclusion was not significant.

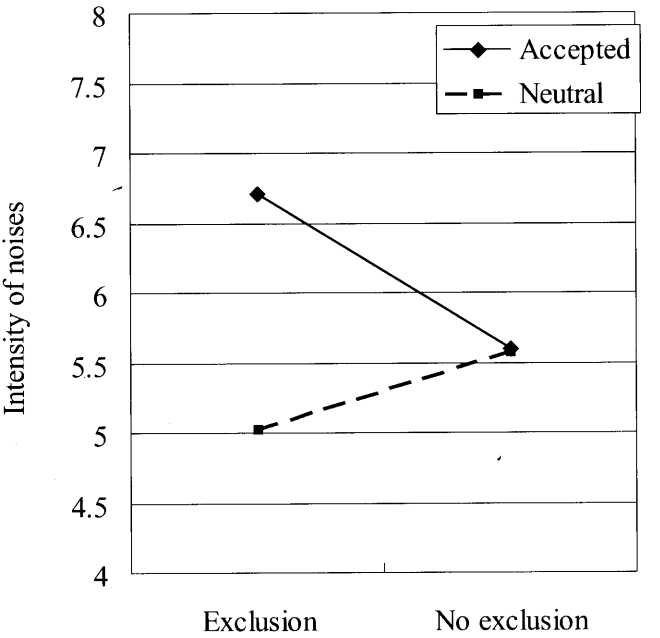

Figure 1. An interaction between the acceptance and the exclusion on the intensity of noises which the participants gave an outgroup member.

Discussion

In this study, it was examined whether social exclusion and acceptance intensified intergroup conflicts. Specifically author tested the hypothesis that socially excluded participants would intensify third party aggression only when they were accepted by a fellow ingroup member. Consistent with this hypothesis, it was found that those who were accepted by a fellow ingroup member but excluded by others showed more strong aggressive behavior against those who harm the fellow ingroup member. This suggests that the need for belongingness is crucial for intergroup conflict.

The other interesting finding in our study is that a main effect of social exclusion was not significant. According to Twenge and his colleagues (Twenge, 2005; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), individuals who were excluded by others showed high aggressiveness against others. However, our finding indicates that in the case of intergroup situation, the conflict was escalated not by social exclusion but by social acceptance. Although it may be a common sense that acceptance is positive social treatment and exclusion is negative one, the results of this study suggest that social exclusion may not so intensify intergroup conflict than it has been expected.

As mentioned above, it was also found that acceptance by a fellow ingroup member strongly affected on third party aggression. As Kumagai (2007) assumed, this may be moderated by group identification. Acceptance and group identification may be able to explain why religious or ethnic groups tend to engender conflict more frequently than other type of groups. In general, religious

or ethnic groups are high in similarity among fellow ingroup members. The similarity may make them expect being accepted then it enhances group identification. Our study suggests that positive intragroup relationship such as being accepted may exert strong effects on group identification. Besides because of its positivity, negative consequence of acceptance on intergroup conflict have been missed. Although the relationship between acceptance and group identification was not examined directly, negative aspect of acceptance should be examined in future research.

Finally, it may be debatable that the participants became aggressive not because they felt their group was harmed but they just liked the victim. Although we could not directly examine the validity of this interpretation, a study on third party aggression by Kumagai and Ohbuchi (2009b) showed that there were no differences between when the partner and the victim was the same person or when they were different persons. In both cases, third party aggression was moderated by group identification. Thus, it may be possible to assume that third party aggression was not enhanced by the liking to accepted partner but by the satisfied need for belongingness and group identification in this study.

This study examined how the need for belongingness was strongly associated with third party aggression. This also suggests that intergroup conflict may occur for various reasons, that is, it is not only caused by negative reasons such as exclusion but also, ironically, positive reasons such as acceptance. The findings may give implications for resolution for different types of intergroup conflicts over the world.

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